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ABSTRACT

The digest examines aspects of serving gifted and talented handicapped students in the schools. This population includes persons of outstanding ability or potential who are capable of high performance despite handicaps such as visual, hearing or orthopedic impairments; emotional disturbances; or learning disabilities. Examples of prominent gifted and talented handicapped individuals, such as Helen Keller and Franklin D. Roosevelt, are cited. The need for providing special education programs to these students is emphasized. Possible impacts of disabilities on the student's development of intelligence or talent are considered. Identification concerns include educating teachers, parents, and diagnosticians to search for potential. Biographical information records, and peer evaluation forms may be used. Services to these students can be promoted by such approaches as encouraging support for research on the topic and on the formation of advocate groups. (CL)

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THE GIFTED AND TALENTED HANDICAPPED

Who Are the Gifted and Talented Handicapped?

The gifted and talented handicapped are persons of outstanding ability or potential who are capable of high performance, despite handicaps such as visual, hearing, or orthopedic impairments, emotional disturbances, or learning disabilities. They require special educational programs beyond those normally provided by the regular school program which take both their giftedness and talent and their handicap into account.

How Can Someone Be Both Handicapped and Gifted and Talented?

Even though this may seem like a contradiction in terms, a moment's reflection reveals that many people can be exceptional in more than one way. Some prominent examples of gifted and talented people with handicaps include humanitarian Helen Keller (blind, deaf, and mute), Leonardo da Vinci (learning disabled), Franklin D. Roosevelt (orthopedically handicapped), and rock star Stevie Wonder (blind).

Why Is It Necessary to Provide the Gifted and Talented Handicapped with Special Educational Programs?

Special programs for the gifted and talented handicapped are necessary because the unique physical, intellectual, and creative needs of this group cannot be met within the context of a regular school program. Despite the lack of firm research data, an educated guess can be made that there may be close to 300,000 school age children in the United States who are both gifted and talented and handicapped in some way. Because of its high visibility, it is often the handicapping condition of these children which receives special attention while their intellectual and creative development is overlooked. Prominent gifted and talented handicapped persons, while certainly noteworthy for their achievements despite obstacles, are exceptions to the rule. When we consider that the development of gifts and talents in children is justified in its own right it seems all the more appropriate to use that development to help overcome their disabilities in other areas.

What Effect Does a Handicapping Condition Have on the Development of Intelligence or Talent?

Because each child must be looked at as an individual, it is impossible to say conclusively what the effect of a given handicapping condition will be without a thorough assessment. Since it is more easily recognized, however, the handicapping condition often disguises a person's true abilities and potential. The disability is only one area of need and educating children with only their handicap in mind often results in inappropriate educational placement.

However, a physical handicap can often impair development in other areas because it limits access to information, resources, and opportunity. But, if specific attention is paid to the improvement of the total educational environment when handicapped people are served, negative effects can be minimized and often reversed to give positive results. If a concentrated effort is made to serve the physical, intellectual, and creative needs of these persons, a better balance between physical and mental development can be achieved. They can, in fact, complement each other.

How Can the Gifted and Talented Handicapped Be Identified?

The basic identification problem is removing the mask that a disability can place over intellectual ability, talent, and creativity. People with obvious handicaps, such as blindness or deafness, can be readily identified, as can those with obvious mental or creative gifts and talents. But identifying the true ability of a deaf child who has inadequate communication skills or of a physically handicapped person who cannot hold a pencil properly presents a unique problem and a challenge. Talent and ability may be present but blocked. While standardized intelligence and achievement tests are often used to help identify gifted children, such tests cannot be considered reliable in identifying the same abilities in handicapped children.

One strategy is to educate teachers, parents, and educational diagnosticians to look for potential. Instead of asking questions about demonstrated ability, use your imagination to envision what capabilities a particular child might have if that child did not have a disability.

Some special identification techniques which can be useful in identifying gifted and talented handicapped children include the following.

- *Biographical information forms.* These combine information about the child drawn from a wide variety of persons (parents, teachers, relatives, and peers) and contexts (home, school, the community, and at play).
- *Behavioral checklists.* These provide information about the ways in which handicapped children might respond to different kinds of situations, coping mechanisms they might have developed for their disabilities, and attitudinal responses they might make to their environments. Information of this kind can often be used to predict future performance.
- *Play observation records.* These can be used to gather information about behavior in less structured situations, such as peer relating abilities, leadership qualities, and creativity.
- *Peer evaluation forms.* These can be very revealing sources of information about a child since children very often see things in their friends that adults have forgotten how to look for.

What Can Be Done to Promote Services for the Gifted and Talented Handicapped?

- A major goal is to increase public awareness to the needs of the gifted and talented handicapped by bringing them to the attention of local and state education authorities, by supporting advocacy efforts in their behalf, and by learning more about them
- Parents, teachers, and school administrators can encourage support for research in the field of gifted and talented handicapped

- The development of special programs needs to be encouraged as do more appropriate curricula and materials.
- Advocate groups of concerned parents, educators, civic groups, and other interested persons can be formed in both the private and public sectors
- Better methods for identifying the gifted and talented handicapped should be encouraged, including referral, diagnostic, placement, and educational evaluation strategies

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